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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests a strategy for the evaluation of programs designed for Native children enrolled in predominantly non-Native urban school districts. The strategy provides a means by which Native people can increase their involvement in, responsibility for, and control of the education of their children. The paper is divided into five sections. The first is concerned with the formulation of school district policies. The second discusses the effect of contextual variables on the choice of evaluation strategy. The third section explicates the responsive, stakeholder approach to evaluation. Emphasis is placed on the political nature of the evaluation process, and a framework for describing the dimensions of stakeholder involvement is outlined. The fourth section focusses on the planning of a responsive evaluation in providing a study design and three key components (evaluation committee, techniques of data gathering, and rigor of study) to consider. The final section considers the implications of responsive evaluation in the broader context of Native education. An 8-step outline in planning a responsive evaluation is contained in the appendix. (Author/ERB)

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EVALUATING PROGRAMS FOR NATIVE STUDENTS: A RESPONSIVE STRATEGY

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Abstract

This paper suggests a strategy for the evaluation of programs designed for Native children enrolled in public schools. The ideas incorporated stem from acceptance of the premise that Native people should increase their involvement in, and responsibility for, their children's schooling.

The paper is divided into five sections as follows:

- initial discussion revolves around the formulation of school district policies. The importance of considering a number of value perspectives is emphasized.
- the relationship between the program to be evaluated and its context forms the focus of the second section. Factors which determine choice of evaluation strategy are suggested. These range from the constraints within which evaluators inevitably function to the network of interrelated factors which affect the evaluation of any program in any particular setting. Although evaluators vary in the degree of credence they afford to the effects of these contextual variables, the writer makes the point that contextual factors are bona fide sources of variation and should therefore be included in the evaluation.
- the third section explicates the responsive, stakeholder approach to evaluation (Stake, 1975; Guba and Lincoln, 1981). Central to this approach is the tenet that an evaluation study must be responsive to the concerns and issues raised by the individuals and groups who are directly or indirectly affected by the program being evaluated, by the process of evaluation, or by the outcomes of the evaluation. Thus, each individual has a "stake" in the evaluation which varies according to the degree of individual awareness or acceptance of the evaluation study, and according to the degree of involvement in the evaluation per se. The extent of each stake, however, is often confusing and is rarely made explicit. The section concludes with a discussion of the writer's framework for clarifying the dimensions of stakeholder involvement.
- the penultimate section provides a generalized study design and considers three key components: (i) the evaluation committee; (ii) techniques of data-gathering; and (iii) the rigor of the study.
- the final section develops some of the implications of responsive evaluation in the broader context of Native education.

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This paper suggests a strategy for the evaluation of programs designed for Native children enrolled in predominately non-Native urban school districts. The strategy provides a means by which Native people can increase their involvement in, responsibility for and control of the education of their children (National Indian Brotherhood,1973; Cardinal,1977).

The paper is divided into five sections. The first is concerned with the formulation of school district policies. The second discusses the effect of contextual variables on the choice of evaluation strategy. The third section explicates the responsive, stakeholder approach to evaluation (Stake,1975; Guba and Lincoln,1981). Emphasis is placed on the political nature of the evaluation process, and a framework for describing the dimensions of stakeholder involvement is outlined. The fourth focusses on the planning of a responsive evaluation, while the final section considers the implications of responsive evaluation in the broader context of Native education.

(1) Determining District Policies

Boards of school trustees are governing authorities in school districts. In their capacity as elected representatives of people living within school district boundaries, trustees are responsible for adopting school district policies that reflect the many and varied interests and demands of their Native and non-Native constituents. Policies are declarations of intent; they indicate priorities and provide directions for future action. Trustees demonstrate support for a policy by making its implementation a priority and by allocating school district

resources accordingly.

The process of policy implementation in school districts characteristically involves the development of programs and procedures designed to guide the behaviour of staff and students so that the intent of the policy is realized. It is through the process of implementation, therefore, that the school experience can be tailored to provide pertinent program offerings and optimal learning conditions for Native students.

Decisions relating to the determination of priorities and to the allocation of resources are usually made in collaboration with non-Native school district administrators. In some urban districts, however, there are formalized avenues by which Native Advisory groups can also inform the policy process[1]. Ideally, the development of a school district policy involves soliciting and incorporating the suggestions of the community groups and school-based groups concerned. These groups make up the political milieu of the district. They may include members of Band and Regional councils or advisory groups; or they may include teachers, counsellors, home-school workers, administrators, language instructors, curriculum developers, parents or students. It is to these constituents that school trustees are accountable. Rarely, however, are the groups homogeneous in terms of their desires and demands, and rarely are their positions congruent. Trustees have to acknowledge and come to some understanding of this plurality before they can justifiably claim to represent the interests of their constituents.

(2) Choosing a Strategy

In the context of a school district and therefore for the purposes of this paper, evaluators are those who are contracted by a board of school trustees to inform the policy-making process. They provide information which may be used to facilitate both the development and implementation or reconsideration of district policies. In order to serve a useful function in the policy-making context, however, evaluators must appreciate the contrasts in Native and non-Native ideological and political stances, and must understand the cultural values of the people with whom they interact (Friesen, 1977; Scollon and Scollon, 1981).

Guba and Lincoln (1981) define evaluation as a "process for describing an evaluand and judging its merit and worth" (1981:35). The evaluand is the object or focus of the evaluation. In this paper, programs for Native students in public schools provide a focus. Merit refers to the intrinsic value of such programs, while worth refers to their value in context[2]. The task of determining worth, however, is difficult and often controversial as standards vary according to a person's values and experience of the program in a particular setting at a particular time.

There is often a complex relationship between the program and its real-life context. Contextual variables may include geographic, political, social and economic factors, as well as, for example, relationships between teachers and students, or parents and administrators at a local school. Individuals and groups within a school district have different

values, beliefs, perceptions and priorities. People react differently to issues in Native education. The degree of concern is variable. The fact that people are concerned about the provision of programs for Native students, however, makes it imperative that the views of school district constituents are given careful consideration by those involved in producing policy directives. Thus, an evaluation should utilize an approach which identifies interested individuals and groups, clarifies their concerns and incorporates a plurality of value perspectives (Smith,1977). These suggestions are integral to the approach described in the following section, and it is for this reason that the strategy is considered appropriate for the evaluation of programs for Native students in public schools.

(3) Responsive Evaluation: The Stakeholder Approach

The descriptor "responsive" was first used in reference to an approach to evaluation by Robert Stake (1975). Central to this approach is the tenet that evaluations must be responsive to the concerns and issues[3] raised by the individuals and groups who are affected in some way by the program to be evaluated, its evaluation, or by the outcomes of that evaluation. In this way, each individual and member of a group has a "stake" in the evaluation. Not all groups have equivalent stakes, however, as the extent of each stake varies according to the nature of individual interests and formal or informal position within the school district.

Following preliminary discussions with the clients (ie: trustees or their representatives), evaluators identify key

individuals and as a result of dialogue with them are able to determine possible stakeholding groups and the initial general direction of the study. Examples of stakeholding groups concerned with the schooling of Native children in large urban districts are illustrated in Figure 1 below. The arrows (i) indicate stakeholder interaction with the evaluators, and (ii) suggest avenues by which stakeholders in the community and school system may gain access to the trustees. Band or Regional Councils, for example, may act on behalf of the Native communities, while the trustees, as part of the formal hierarchy of the school system, generally receive direct input from senior district personnel.

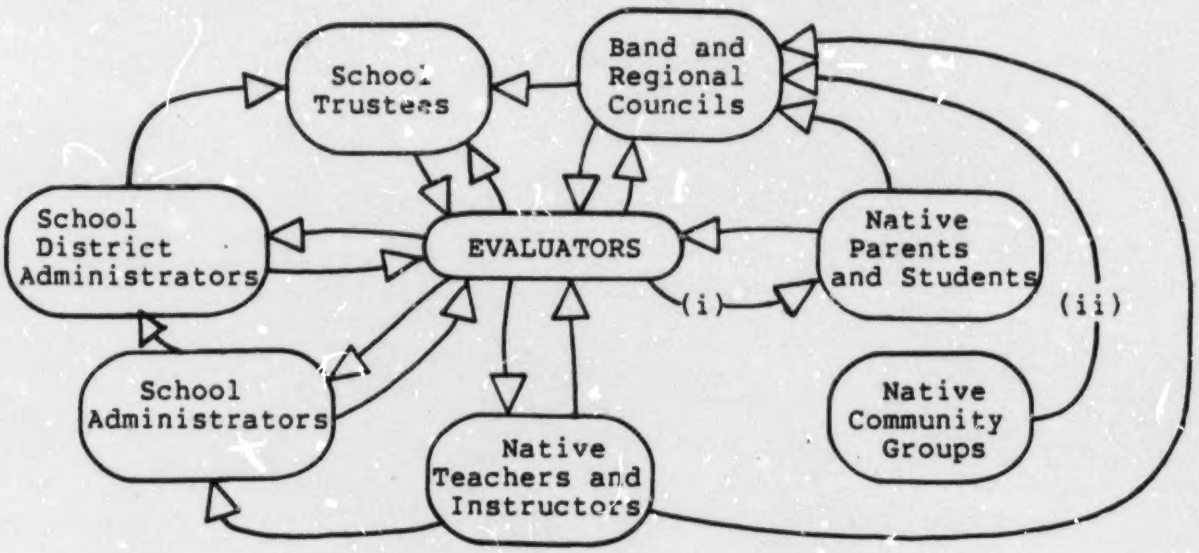


Figure 1. Stakeholding Groups

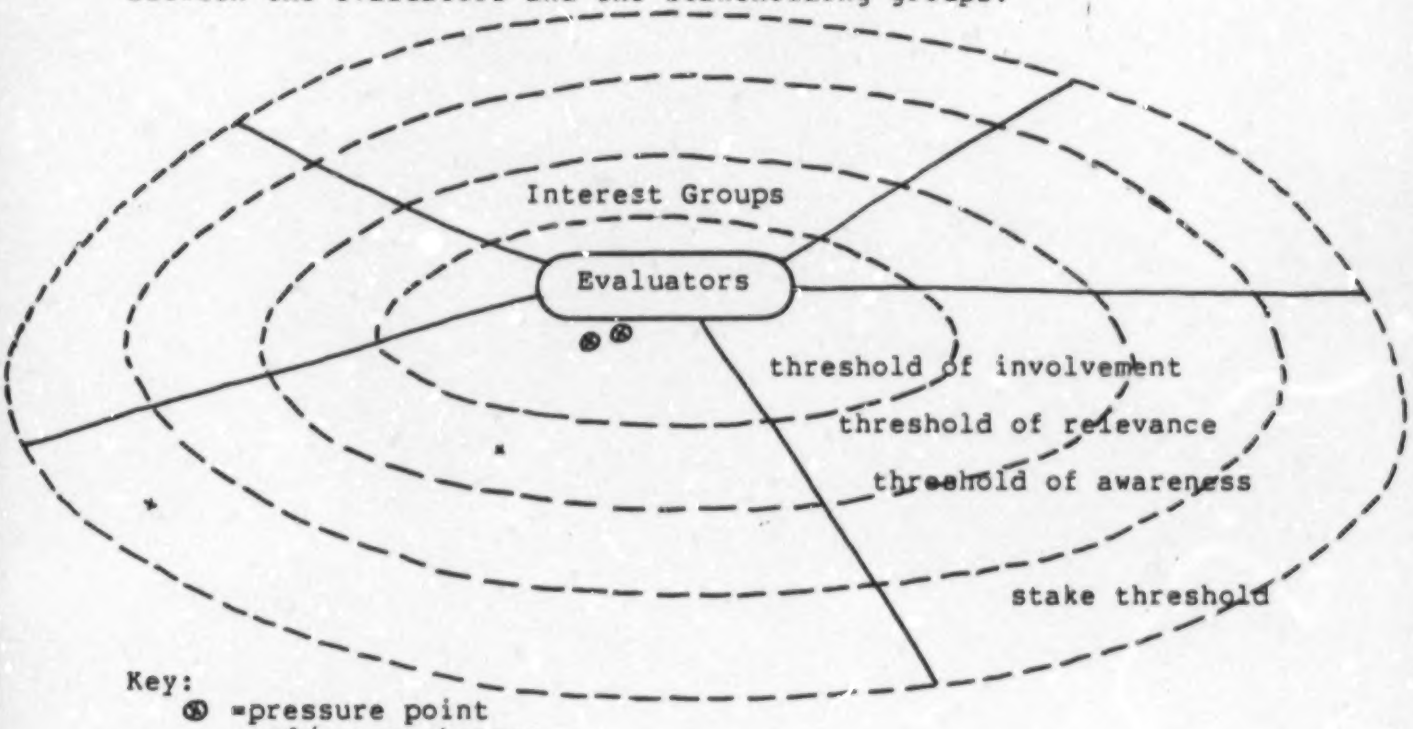
Evaluators cannot canvass the views of all stakeholders. Instead, evaluators seek to obtain representative views of those concerned. The identification of stakeholding groups, subgroups or factions is often problematic, however, as neither their identity nor the degree of their involvement is necessarily made explicit (Weiss, 1983). Groups or individuals may

not be aware of their stakes or they may make a conscious decision to keep their views to themselves. There are others who have such high stakes, however, that not only may they bring pressure to bear on the evaluators, but they may also act as "gatekeepers" by attempting to control access to and input from other stakeholders.

As evaluators engage in the process of becoming informed they take on a variety of different roles such as data collector, organizer, time manager, information giver, information seeker and negotiator. It is this negotiating role that is of consequence in the context of a responsive evaluation. Not all views will be shared by all stakeholding groups, in fact it is likely that conflicting views will emerge. Evaluators are required to negotiate amongst the groups and present the views of all of them in the final report. Negotiation is a political process and successful evaluators must be fully cognizant of the political processes at work. Appreciation of the political factors at play is crucial to the successful completion of the study, yet such factors may not be apparent at the start.

Difficulties in conceptualising the complexities of the political context prompted this writer to develop a descriptive framework in order to illustrate and attempt to clarify some of these relationships, see Figure 2. The stakes held by each group of stakeholders differ according to shifting thresholds of awareness, relevance, and involvement. Note that the central position of the evaluators is indicative of neither ethnocentrism nor "evalucentrism." Instead, this position facilitates explanation, and therefore understanding, of the relationship

between the evaluators and the stakeholding groups.



(Note that interest groups are groups that seek to influence policy according to the shared purposes of group members)

Figure 2. Stakeholder Awareness and Involvement

The outer ellipse marked "stake threshold" delineates the entire school district. Each segment represents a particular group of stakeholders. Each group has a different number of members, and each group or individual may have differing thresholds of awareness, of relevance, and of involvement. These stakeholders nearest the stake threshold are not actively involved and may not be aware that the study is in progress. Even if they are aware of the study, they may have decided that the issues raised are not relevant to them at the time and, consequently, that there is no need for them to become involved.

As the stakeholders increase their proximity to the evaluators or program to be evaluated. their degree of awareness increases as may their degree of involvement. Those found between the threshold of involvement and the evaluators are likely to be those who have admitted their involvement and are either in support of or opposed to the evaluation. They may also have the greatest stake in the outcomes. Individuals and groups may become so involved that they exert considerable pressure on the evaluators and may make deliberate attempts to affect the outcomes of the evaluation. Once the dynamics of the processes are recognized, the evaluators may attempt to include the views of other stakeholders and not rely solely on those of individuals who, by virtue of their positions, have closest contact with the evaluators.

Responsive evaluations that use the concept of stakeholding as their basic premise are designed to collect data and to convey information in order to facilitate the understanding of evaluators and stakeholders alike. The data form a base which is extended and strengthened as the study progresses. Evaluators are able to produce a complete and comprehensive description of the program under consideration. They determine the merit of a program and they refer to the multiple and often contradictory standards of the stakeholding groups, and use these to ascertain the value of part or parts of the program in context.

As the study evolves, an information exchange takes place between stakeholders and evaluators. Not only do evaluators collect data, they also answer questions and respond to requests

for information. During the course of the study, stakeholders come to realize that although not all their questions can be answered, their input does have value and does play a part in the evaluation. Awareness is heightened and individuals are encouraged to recognize their positions, now legitimated by the evaluative process, and inform decision-making bodies of their views. Stakeholders' knowledge is often confirmed and they see the study build up around the issues and concerns that they have raised. The evaluators provide feedback and can attempt to resolve any misunderstandings.

Underlying this information exchange is the assumption that increased involvement of stakeholders, however large or small their stakes, will lead to increased commitment to the evaluation process and to its outcomes. Thus, the likelihood of the completed evaluation report languishing unread and unused is minimized, while the likelihood that it is read and, further, that it is acted upon, is greatly increased.

(4) Planning a Responsive Evaluation

The design of a responsive evaluation emerges as the study progresses; each step is dependent on what has gone before. If the clients are to accept the legitimacy of the approach, however, it is vital that evaluators make their methods of inquiry explicit. This is important as the exact design cannot be specified in the normatively accepted style of evaluation where precise procedural details are outlined at the start. Clients may raise concerns about how and from whom information is to be obtained; about the reliability of the data collected and about

the validity of an approach with no apparent focus. Evaluators must make clear that conceptually, the study is organized around the issues and concerns that emerge from discussions with the stakeholders and that evaluators can ensure that salient issues and concerns are identified and explicated as the evaluation progresses.

It is the responsibility of the evaluators to delimit the bounds of the evaluation so that the clients' requirements may be within their time-frame and within their budget allocation. Given these constraints it becomes necessary for evaluators to adopt an evaluative stance which will optimize the utility of the evaluation while ensuring that its feasibility, propriety, and technical accuracy (rigor) are not jeopardized (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1981).

A general plan (adapted from Stake and Pearsol, 1981) is appended to this paper. The activities and explanatory notes provide the prospective evaluator with some practical suggestions for designing a responsive evaluation. Worthy of special note are (a) the evaluation committee, (b) techniques of data-gathering and (c) the rigor of a responsive evaluation. Each is discussed below.

(a) The Evaluation Committee

The inclusion of an evaluation committee goes far to ensure that representatives from community groups are actively involved in the evaluation (Owston, 1983). Committee members can keep their constituent groups informed so that concerned individuals need not wait for the final pronouncement of the

evaluators; there should be no surprises.

In addition to providing the evaluators with the opportunity to collaborate with community groups and school district personnel, the evaluation committee acts as a sounding board and its members receive the interim and final reports. Once the evaluators' contract is completed, committee members can engage in follow-up discussions and may also become involved in long-term monitoring of the effects of the study. In this way, community members have considerable control over the course of the study and the evaluators, rather than acting as outside experts, function as facilitators. Thus, responsibility is shared and Native people increase their involvement in the provision of suitable programs for their children.

(b) Data Gathering Techniques

Three useful techniques of collecting data in context are interviews, review of documents and records, and community meetings.

Interviews vary along a continuum ranging from semi-structured to unstructured and are modified to accommodate each interview setting, respondent and evaluator. In the semi-structured interview, points for discussion are raised by the evaluator and both evaluator and respondent function within a shared frame of reference. In the unstructured interview, the chosen frame of reference depends on the respondent's own perceptions of the area that the evaluator suggests. As the individual discusses his or her own ideas, that person's own belief system emerges. Questions raised by the evaluator occur in

conversational mode and are phrased in a way that incorporates the respondent's own views of the world. The evaluator becomes the "learner" and the respondent, the "teacher".

Documents and records provide other sources of data which are grounded in the context of the evaluation. Documents may include copies of correspondence, memoranda, and internal departmental reports, while records consist primarily of official recordings of proceedings such as school board meetings, or numbers of Native children in district schools classified according to age and grade level. These written sources can give an indication of the social, political, and historical background of the study. Values and attitudes and perceptions of particular occurrences may be ascertained and relationships among people may be illuminated.

Community meetings are vehicles for the exchange of information and the expression of opinions and priorities. Interactions between evaluators and community representatives facilitate both communication and mutual understanding. Community members give testimonies, make speeches, ask questions and address issues, while evaluators explain their function, take note of community concerns and raise questions for discussion.

(c) Rigor of the Evaluation

Evaluators should not shun responsive studies for fear of being accused of the "sins of subjectivity." Responsive evaluations can still be as rigorous as their more "scientific" counterparts. Guba and Lincoln (1981) have reinterpreted the commonly-accepted scientific criteria for ameliorating any

problems of rigor. They suggest that reliability and validity may be established through member checks, triangulation, independent observer analysis and phenomenon recognition. These processes are designed to cross-check various pieces of information.

As member checks are made the experience of the evaluator is checked against that of the group members. Thus, the evaluator may ask the respondent to describe the circumstances of a particular situation that other respondents have already described.

Triangulation involves exposing a proposition to possible counter-facts or verifying a proposition with data from other sources or data arrived at in various ways. When various pieces of evidence tend to support the existence of a particular phenomenon, its existence becomes more credible. The information from the documents and records, for example, can be used to verify data from meetings or interviews.

Independent observer analysis involves the use of other people involved in the evaluation. If different people observe similar instances and draw similar conclusions, then their observations and interpretations become more credible. The final credibility test involves the recognition of the phenomenon as real by those actually involved in the situation under scrutiny. Thus the evaluators take back their perceptions of the situation and discuss their findings with some of the respondents who provided the initial data.

(5) Implications

Implicit in the responsive approach to evaluation is

the recognition and acceptance of different value systems. Non-Native people working in the field of Native education must be cognizant of value systems other than their own and must comprehend Native needs for political and socio-economic opportunity. The report of the Special Committee on Native Self-Government in Canada makes it clear that Native people want power to make their own decisions and to carry out their own plans for Native education (1983:31). By engaging in the kind of evaluation processes suggested in this paper, Native people can influence the formulation and implementation of school district policies which affect their children.

Native and non-Native people within a school district can work with evaluators and can share responsibility for determining the direction and focus of an evaluation, as well as for its processes and the outcomes. This sharing of responsibility is illustrative of a shift away from the traditional power of the outside evaluator towards a sharing of power among community members and contracted evaluators (Freire 1981). The resulting redistribution of power and responsibility is consistent with the movement towards Native control of Native education. To date, however, this change in emphasis has not been indicative of interactions between Native and non-Native people in Canada (Report of the Special Committee,1983).

It is the contention of this writer that the stakeholder approach to the evaluation of programs for Native students in public schools provides one avenue by which Native people can take more responsibility for the education of their children in the predominantly non-Native public system. In this

way, Native people can move closer to achieving the "Indian control of Indian education" that was advocated at national level more than a decade ago.

Footnotes

[1] For example, the elected board of British Columbia District No. 61 (Victoria) is advised by the Indian Education Council in Victoria. The board of School District No. 39 (Vancouver) is advised by the Native Indian Advisory Committee.

[2] Guba and Lincoln (1981:43) suggest that while criteria for assessing merit remain relatively constant (to the extent that consensus about the merit of a program can be reached), criteria for assessing worth are variable; they are dependent on local contextual factors.

[3] Issues are propositions that allow for different views and which may cause conflict. Concerns are matters of interest which may be perceived as having potentially undesirable consequences.

Planning a Responsive Evaluation

NEGOTIATION OF AGREEMENT WITH CLIENTS AND FRAMEWORK FOR STUDY

Determine areas of responsibility - channels of communication - ownership of study - evaluator autonomy - clarify purpose - identify broad areas for study - collect general descriptive information - establish terms of reference - agree on arrangements for funding, setting up evaluation committee and publicity - ensure confidentiality and respondent anonymity - decide on reporting procedures and ways to access informants - request documents and records - anticipate problems

FORMULATION OF FORSHADOWING QUESTIONS AND IDENTIFICATION OF GENERAL AREAS OF CONCERN

Develop list of questions to aid conceptualization of study and to form initial points of departure for investigation - such questions form a focus for ideas re: direction of study - they might include: Why were programs initiated? Developed? Who was responsible? Were local needs identifed? How? Who will benefit from the evaluation? Which groups are involved? What curriculum materials are available? How are the teachers trained? Supervised? How do students, parents, administrators, feel about the program?

DATA GATHERING: STAGE ONE

On-site observation - interviews with key district personnel - document analysis - identify major stakeholders - identify informants from stakeholding groups - conduct interviews in schools and community - consider political (power and territoriality) and human (anxiety) factors involved - realize importance of establishing and developing trust - appreciate different value platforms - develop conscious awareness of multiple perspectives of evaluand - establish relationships, especially with gatekeepers - identify sources of particular data, eg: school records - be aware of effects of information overload - organize system for data collection, storage, and retrieval - meet with evaluation committee - - collect curriculum materials - arrange for community meetings - determine stakeholder priorities

INITIAL DATA ANALYSIS; FOCUS ON KEY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Cross-check data from different sources to begin validation process - review field notes and tapes - determine categories for organization of data - identify concerns and issues

PRESENTATION OF OPEN-ENDED INTERIM REPORT TO EVALUATION COMMITTEE

Present categories (now arranged as concerns and issues) for feedback - committee members check credibility of data - evaluators and committee members plan further stages of study and consider ways to disseminate information and provide follow-up

DATA GATHERING: STAGE TWO

Carry out second-stage interviews with extended range of informants - refine categories of issues and concerns - redevelop ideas and look for conflicting evidence to disconfirm and invalidate findings - ensure triangulation of data - member checks - step-wise replication of data

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Make sense of data including information from interviews, observations, non-verbal cue interpretation - - ensure that records are available (for audit) - choose illustrations, quotes, testimonies - make tape of responses from communities, especially from elders - refer back to informants in order to clarify and confirm

REPORTING RESULTS: DEVELOPMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP

Include description of evaluand in context - refer to data collection methodologies and methods of reporting - include comment on evaluator biases and conceptual reasoning - draft final report - decide on dissemination of information - arrange for report to be made available to community - consider evaluand in broader context - make explicit links with other organizations and groups - comment on issues raised in Canadian context - ensure that arrangements are made for follow-up discussions/presentations with stakeholding groups

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